



Town of Groton, Connecticut

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Meeting Minutes - **Draft**

Representative Town Meeting

Moderator Rita Schmidt Representatives **Joe Baril, Tom Barnhart, Lori Bartinik, Alicia Bauer, Genevieve Cerf, Michael Collins, Syma Ebbin, Peter Fairbank, Robert Garcia, Patrice Granatosky, Dolores Harrell, Debra Jenkins, Carole McCarthy, Kevin McMahon, Richard Metayer, David Miner, Deborah Monteiro, James Moulding, Scott Newsome, Nora Patterson, Deborah Peruzzotti, Joy Plunket, Robert Post, Kevin Power, Don Pratt, Mary-Ellen Schefers, Eleanor Scussel, Jack Sebastian, Jennifer Smuts, Eleanor Steere, Fritz Stein, Joan Steinfeld, Irma Streeter, Mark Svencer, Patti Thunberg, Cheryl Tilney, Kevin Trejo, Tom Vivirito, Robert Walker Sr, and John Wheeler.**

Wednesday, January 10, 2007

7:30 PM

Senior Center

A. ROLL CALL

*Moderator Rita Schmidt called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.
29 members were present, and a quorum was declared.*

Members Present: Moderator Schmidt, Rep. Baril, Rep. Bartinik, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cerf, Rep. Collins, Rep. Ebbin, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Harrell, Rep. Metayer, Rep. Monteiro, Rep. Moulding, Rep. Patterson, Rep. Peruzzotti, Rep. Plunket, Rep. Power, Rep. Pratt, Rep. Sebastian, Rep. Smuts, Rep. Steere, Rep. Stein, Rep. Steinfeld, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Tilney, Rep. Trejo, Rep. Vivirito, Rep. Walker, Sr. and Rep. Wheeler, Jr.

Members Absent: Rep. Barnhart, Rep. Fairbank, Rep. Jenkins, Rep. McCarthy, Rep. McMahon, Rep. Miner, Rep. Newsome, Rep. Post, Rep. Schefers, Rep. Scussel, Rep. Svencer and Rep. Thunberg

Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger, Assistant to the Town Manager Lee Vincent, Parks and Recreation Director John Silsby, Recreation Superintendent Jerry Lokken, Golf Professional Todd Goodhue, Public Works Director Gary Schneider, Police Chief Kelly Fogg, Town Clerk Barbara Tarbox, and Assistant Town Clerk Sally Whitney.

B. MOMENT OF SILENCE AND SALUTE TO THE FLAG

The Moderator announced that Groton Boy Scout Troop 2 Honor Guard will parade the colors after the members observe a moment of silence. She requested that everyone remember the late President Gerald Ford at this time. The Salute to the Flag was led by Gerard Bennett, Senior Patrol Leader. Scoutmaster John Sidlinger was present with the troop which is currently working on the Citizenship in the Community merit badge.

C. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF DECEMBER 13, 2007

A motion that the minutes be adopted was made by Rep. Trejo, seconded by Rep. Pratt. Rep. Sebastian asked that his request for permission to speak with Dr. Mitchell to obtain additional information to his questions and the fact that no objections were made by any member be noted under "Other Business".

The vote to accept the minutes as amended carried 26 in favor, 3 abstentions. (Abstaining: Reps. Smuts, Monteiro, Walker)

D. CITIZENS' PETITIONS

Anna Barber, 2906 Gold Star Highway spoke in support of the design work to meet all state guidelines and obtain an accurate cost estimate for the animal shelter. She asked the members to have compassion and help care for the animals by approving the request for \$25,000. Ms. Barber commended Control Officer Donna Duso for all her hard work and dedication to her job.

Wendy Eckholm, 165 Benham Road, stated that the Groton Animal Foundation wants the community of Groton to provide an adequate, decent, modern facility for animals. She requested

that members support the \$25,000 for Preliminary Design Development Work for an Animal Shelter which is the first step in actually providing an updated facility for our community.

Tim Pratt, 75 Front Street, Noank, agreed with the previous speakers and urged members to approve the preliminary design work. He mentioned that his father established a memorial fund that currently assists the animal pound. He stated that the Groton Animal Foundation is working to raise funds to assist the Town in this endeavor.

Mary Elaine Kelly, 40 Plant Street, asked for the members' support and feels that the current facility needs to be improved. She wants to see the project go forward now.

Maryiellen French, 12 Little Gull Lane, suggested that building a new animal facility is similar to building a hospital rather than a house, since many regulations are in place for a community animal shelter. She also asked for support from the members.

E. RECEPTION OF COMMUNICATIONS

Moderator Schmidt reported that Rep. Scussel will be absent for the January, February and March meetings; Rep. McCarthy will be absent for January and February; Reps. Fairbank, Miner, Svencer and Thunberg are unable to attend this meeting.

Parks & Recreation Budget Presentation

Parks and Recreation Director John Silsby stated that each year he likes to share information with the RTM about changes in programs and the direction that the department is proceeding. He introduced Todd Goodhue, Golf Professional for Shennecossett Golf Course, and Jerry Lokken, Recreation Superintendent.

Mr. Goodhue made a presentation concerning the marketing efforts to improve revenues at the Golf Course. He reviewed the new software system "Point of Sale" that will streamline and assist all aspects of operations at the golf course. He praised Eric Morrison, Shennecossett Golf Course Superintendent and the entire maintenance staff for the excellent care and condition of the course and equipment which is essential for enticing greater play and generating more revenue. He is establishing a rewards program to retain current customers that recognizes frequent players, birthday specials and provides discounts to individuals that play during slow green times.

In response to Rep. Peruzzotti, Mr. Goodhue explained that the redemption of coupons and the "Point of Sale" program are both being used to determine the most effective advertising methods. He stated the cost of the program is included as a line item in the budget.

In response to Rep. Trejo, he explained that coupon redemption associated with advertisements has increased usage.

In response to Rep. Steinfeld, Mr. Goodhue explained that the new private Mashantucket golf course is "not in the same league" as the Town's golf course and therefore not in direct competition. He mentioned that people have been referred by the Mashantucket concierge to the more affordable municipal golf course.

Mr. Lokken noted that he oversees all the programs offered by the Town Recreation Department. He reviewed the collaborative agreement between the Board of Education (BOE) and the Town for use of space at William Seely School. He explained that it is a community center concept. The school provides benefits such as a centralized location and fewer scheduling conflicts. He stated that issues involved in using an old school include the facility upkeep, no accessible restroom, spaces that do not fit the activities being conducted, and a lack of equipment and furniture to foster a community center atmosphere. He mentioned that the facility serves the community seven days a week throughout the year. It also serves as a summer playground site. In the future, it would be desirable to have an actual community center that would include a pool, theater, activity rooms, additional gym space, and wireless cafe.

F. REPORT OF THE TOWN MANAGER:

1. Financial report

Mr. Vincent reported that the Unreserved & Undesignated Fund balance as of July 1, 2006 is approximately \$9.2 million; the General Contingency balance is \$350,000 but a transfer of \$25,000 has been approved by the Council for preliminary work on the animal shelter and this item is on the agenda this evening; the Capital Reserve balance is \$2,778,201. Mr. Vincent stated that the increase is mainly due to interest income.

2. Monthly briefing

Mr. Oefinger stated that information request by Rep. Cerf concerning school bonding and the effect on the mill rate is provided in the newsletter distributed this evening.

The Manager commented that in the December 2006 Parks & Recreation Magazine published by the National Recreation and Parks Association, Groton was mentioned as the host of the National Institute on Recreation Inclusion conference in September 2006. He mentioned that unique circumstances allowed Groton native Fran Mainella, recently retired as Director of the National Park Service to participate in the Avery Point Lighthouse ceremony as her final act of service. The Manager invited members to attend the dedication ceremony and open house for the Noank Hatchery tentatively scheduled for January 31, 2007.

Mr. Oefinger mentioned that the Public Works Department had received second place for Department of the Year 2006 from Public Works Magazine, a major publication for public works professionals. He stated he is very proud of the recognition since this is a national award. He reported that Carl Almquist has been selected to receive the Connecticut 2006 Alfred E. Pelouquin Award at the 2007 New England Water Environment Association Annual Conference being held later this month.

He noted that a invitation to attend the project recognition and pre-dedication ceremony for the Catherine Kolnaski Elementary School on January 12, 2007 is in the newsletter.

He informed members that the WPCA project received three bids within budget and that the review process by the Town and State is currently underway. He projects a start date in March and will provide updates.

The Manager reported that the Tercentennial Playground Challenge was a great success. Final figures are not yet available but donations received easily reached \$40,000 and the benefactor has already given the Town a check for \$50,000. He noted that the monetary donations do not include the services that are being donated by Dicesare Bentley.

Mr. Oefinger cited the need for two volunteers each for two new committees. The first committee is the Flanders Road Utility Task Force and the second is the Phase II School Design Committee. He wants to make the appointments within the next several weeks so the committees can begin their work.

Moderator Schmidt requested that volunteers contact her if they are interested in serving.

Rep. Sebastian thanked the Manager for providing the quarterly school construction newsletters and suggested that the Town strive to remain ahead of schedule to complete in time for the ribbon cutting. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the lack of statistical and background information provided for the Public Works award application.

The Manager responded that every state and department has different budgets and styles, but that he would be happy to review in detail the submittal for the award at a future meeting. .

G. LIAISON REPORTS

1. Town Council - Rep. Monteiro

No report.

2. Economic Development Commission - Rep. Cerf

No meeting, no report.

3. Town Council/Board of Education/RTM Liaison Committee - Rep. Patterson

No meeting, no report.

4. Permanent School Building Committee - Rep. Miner

No report.

5. P.B.F.D. Consolidation Review Committee - Reps. Baril & Steinfeld

No meeting, no report.

6. Shellfish Task Force - Rep. Ebbin

No meeting, no report.

H. COMMITTEE REPORTS**1. FINANCE****a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Granatosky**

No meeting, no report.

2. COMMUNITY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Vivirito**

No meeting, no report.

3. EDUCATION**a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Patterson**

No meeting, no report.

4. HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES**a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Wheeler**

No meeting, no report.

5. RECREATION**a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town- Chairman Power**

No meeting, no report.

6. PUBLIC SAFETY**a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Pratt**

No meeting, no report.

7. PUBLIC WORKS**a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Collins**

Chairman Collins read the minutes of the meeting held on January 3, 2007. (Minutes are attached.)

A motion to accept the minutes was made by Rep. Stein, seconded by Rep. Baril and so voted unanimously.

2006-0296 Preliminary Design Development Work for Animal Shelter**RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING PRELIMINARY DESIGN DEVELOPMENT WORK FOR THE TOWN ANIMAL SHELTER**

WHEREAS, the Town Council has been considering the construction of a new animal shelter for the Town of Groton, and

WHEREAS, the Council has, on several occasions, discussed cost and funding concerns as well as alternative means of protecting animals that are under the Town's custody and care, including the possibility of regional sharing of costs and facilities, and

WHEREAS, it appears that the Town must construct a new animal shelter at the Town's public works complex, now therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Town Manager, Mark R. Oefinger, should proceed with an appropriate level of preliminary design development work to serve as the basis for a decision by the Town Council on the general specifications, total cost, and means of funding for a new animal shelter, and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Town Council hereby authorizes a transfer of \$25,000 from Contingency (10741) to Public Works (Public Buildings) (10352) for the purpose of undertaking this additional design work.

Refer to RTM.

A motion was made by Rep. Collins, seconded by Rep. Walker, Sr., that this matter be Adopted.

In response to Rep. Peruzzotti, the Town Manager explained the discussions at the Council of Government (COG) meetings in regard to the proposed regional animal shelter. He suggested that avenues for both a regional and a local shelter should be investigated to make the best decision possible, since a regional shelter could become a lengthy process and is not guaranteed. He commented that the Town would still be responsible for maintaining holding pens at its own facility and employing an animal control officer. He noted that a multi-year agreement with fees would be necessary with the Humane Society who would be the agency operating the regional shelter. He explained that the preliminary design development study would be shared with COG but the study could not be utilized for a regional shelter since a much larger facility would be necessary and would be built on property already owned by the Humane Society.

In response to Rep. Walker, Mr. Oefinger stated that the report of the Blue Ribbon Facilities Task Force reviewed all town facilities and was a precursor to the school design committee. The report is the most comprehensive review completed of Town facilities and did contain suggested improvements. He explained that the Public Works renovations resulting in the Town Hall Annex initially included renovations to the animal pound but failed at referendum. Subsequently, money was approved for necessary repairs but not for a new facility.

Mr. Schneider provided more historical information on actions taken by the Council to maintain the facility over a number of years. He stated that the Public Works Department has performed repairs but that if major renovations are needed, the Town would be required to meet current code specifications. He feels that the expense of upgrading the current facility to code would not be the most efficient solution.

In response to Rep. Ebbin, Mr. Schneider explained in detail what information the \$25,000 would provide to the Town. He stated it would compute the cost in the current market for a facility similar to the Town of Guilford, provide basic cost per square foot for prefab versus hard built mechanicals, and evaluate the costs for air-conditioning and natural ventilation. He feels that it would establish the proper dimensions and materials and verify the exact cost per square foot if built now. Mr. Schneider stated that he could provide the cost of operating the current facility but noted that operational costs for a new facility would be higher due to the increase in capacity and possible air-conditioning energy usage. The current facility does not have air-conditioning. Chief Fogg addressed the issue of fines. He stated the shelter is not intended to be a revenue operation for the Town.

The Town Manager reiterated that he feels that the preliminary design work for the Town should be done at the same time as the regional concept is investigated. He suggested that Groton would be the major player in the regional facility since it is the largest town to participate. He projected that some of the smaller towns may elect to negotiate privately with the Humane Society since the Society currently has some extra capacity. This may eliminate the need for a regional facility. He explained that a referendum would be necessary only if the Town needs to borrow more than \$750,000. He feels that the more information gathered provides for a better presentation and elicits more public confidence from voters if faced with a referendum.

Rep. Cerf commented that a regional facility would not replace the need for an animal control officer, an office, holding pens, and operational costs. She feels that a regional facility may cause the Town to lose some of the current volunteers at the shelter. A regional facility may not provide as much emphasis on adoption of animals and may increase the number of animals euthanized. She mentioned that the Groton Animal Foundation has raised \$25,000 to date and suggested that a Town wide fund raiser similar to the Tercentennial Playground could be initiated.

Rep. Plunket left at this point in the meeting.

In response to Rep. Trejo, the Manager stated it is his belief that by providing accurate, updated cost information, and a full analysis of options for a replacement facility that the voters would be better informed to approve a referendum if it is necessary. He explained that if a referendum fails, then the Town will continue to maintain and make repairs as necessary and as money allows similar to the last ten years.

Rep. Sebastian noted that after receiving a large volume of correspondence from his constituents, he visited the facility. He feels that it would be adequate if his dog had to spend three or four days. He wondered why the cost of designing an animal shelter would exceed the cost for replacing nine units of Mystic River homes destroyed by a fire especially since those designs had to be reviewed by HUD. He stated he is personally opposed to spending \$25,000 for this study.

Rep. Moulding asked how close the referendum vote was for the shelter.

The Manager suggested that the vote was not close, but noted that the referendum was for the entire Town Hall Annex compound for an estimated \$14 million.

Rep. Moulding stated he believes the Groton Animal Foundation should pay the \$25,000 for the preliminary design study, showing a good faith effort that they will raise funds and become a partner with the Town. He feels that the study will provide the information necessary for the voters at a referendum but that it will fail. He feels that the town will have wasted \$25,000.

Rep. Granatosky stated she had opposed this item in committee. She commented that many people lament the duplication of services and would like to fully evaluate the regional facility before proceeding with a new local shelter that would have to meet code specifications. She feels that meeting the code specifications will drive up the cost necessitating a referendum.

Rep. Steinfeld stated that the local shelter uses every means to place animals and that animals are only euthanized when aggressive and not adoptable. The shelter has two "angels" in the community that pay for necessary veterinary care for cats and dogs. She provided statistics for the number of animal placements due to evictions, no-pet rules and other circumstances.

Rep. Vivirito asked who determined that the cost for the preliminary design work would be \$25,000. He stated he will not support this item.

Rep. Streeter congratulated the residents who founded the Groton Animal Foundation. She stated that a plan is needed for any project and that time is of the essence. She trusts that Town staff will be prudent in the use of the \$25,000 for design work.

Rep. Cerf feels it is not a good idea for the Groton Animal Foundation to provide the money for the preliminary design work. She stated that she supports the request for the \$25,000.

The motion carried by the following vote:

Votes: In Favor: 16 - Moderator Schmidt, Rep. Bauer, Rep. Cerf, Rep. Collins, Rep. Garcia, Rep. Harrell, Rep. Metayer, Rep. Monteiro, Rep. Pratt, Rep. Steere, Rep. Stein, Rep. Streeter, Rep. Tilney, Rep. Trejo, Rep. Walker, Sr. and Rep. Wheeler, Jr.

Opposed: 12 - Rep. Baril, Rep. Bartinik, Rep. Ebbin, Rep. Granatosky, Rep. Moulding, Rep. Patterson, Rep. Peruzzotti, Rep. Power, Rep. Sebastian, Rep. Smuts, Rep. Steinfeld and Rep. Vivirito

Non-voting: 1 - Rep. Plunket

8. RULES & PROCEDURES

a. Chairman's notes on the business of the Town - Chairman Stein

No meeting, no report.

I. OTHER BUSINESS

The Moderator thanked Boy Scout Troop 2 for their participation in the meeting.

J. ADJOURNMENT

A motion to adjourn at 9:38 p.m. was made by Rep. Walker, seconded Rep. Baril and so voted unanimously.

Attest:

Barbara Tarbox, Town Clerk

Clerk of the RTM

Sally A. Whitney, Assistant Town Clerk